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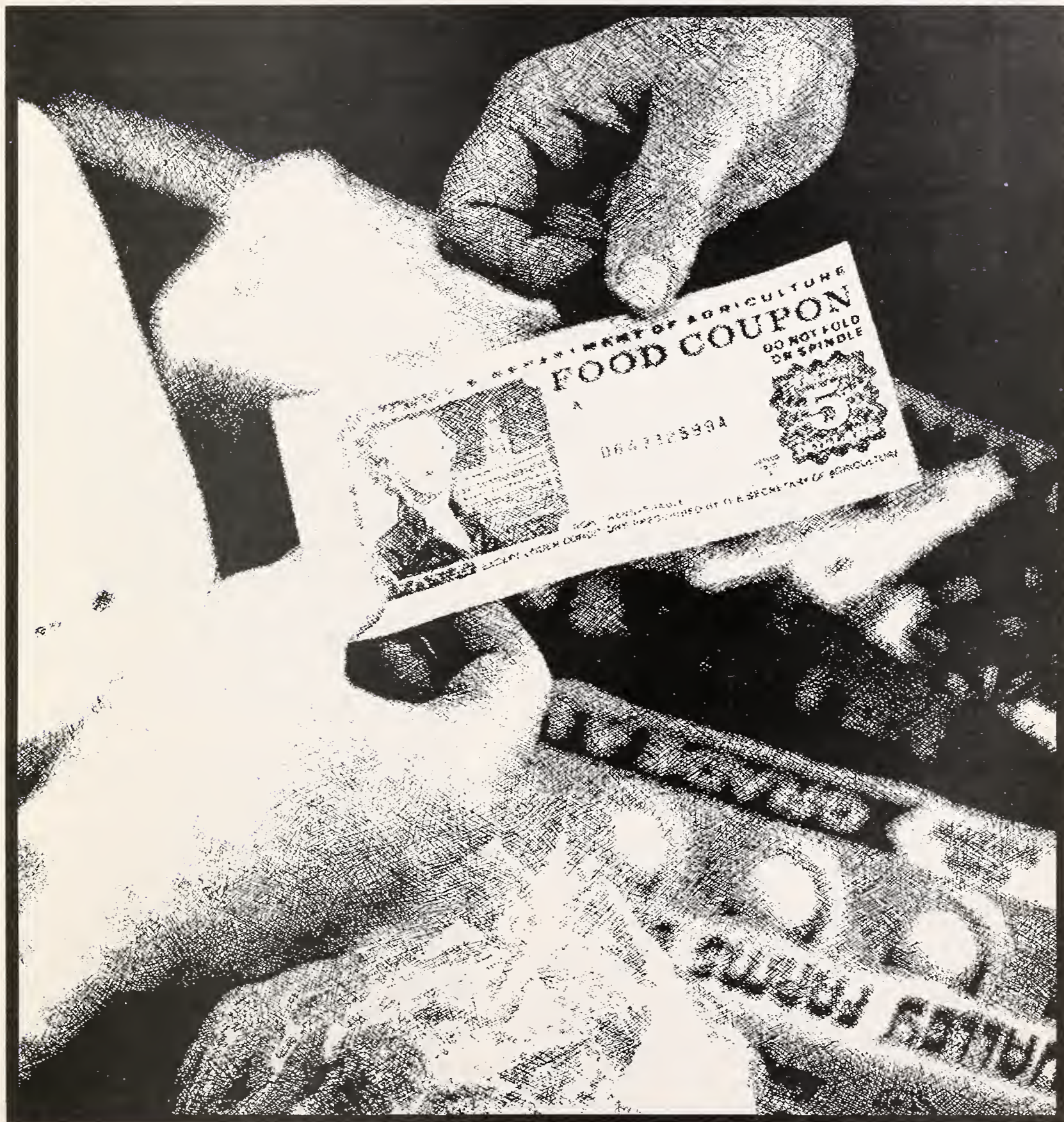


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# Food and Nutrition

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# CHARACTERISTICS OF FOOD STAMP HOUSEHOLDS

## A REPORT ON THE SURVEY CONDUCTED BY FNS

By Linda Feldman

### Introduction

There are about 18 million people getting food stamps. Who are they? What kinds of incomes do they have? Do they work? Do they live in large or small households? Are the households headed by men or women? How many are elderly? How much do they pay for their stamps?

"We need answers to questions like those to properly administer a program of this magnitude," said Carolyn Merck, a food program specialist with the FNS Food Stamp Division. "You can't administer a program of any magnitude without knowing the extent to which program benefits are going to the intended target population."

Carolyn Merck headed up the year-long survey of characteristics of food stamp households, completed by FNS this spring. Based on data collected from actual case records of more than 11,000 households participating in the program in September 1975, the survey provides significant statistics.

Ms. Merck explained, "Due to the interest in program reform that has developed over recent months, we need valid descriptive data on program participants to back up the Department's recommendations for reform."

"Characteristics of Food Stamp Households" will be replacing the annual profile of food stamp participants, which FNS has put together for the last several years. The profile was instituted in 1968 when the program averaged only 2.2 million participants, and it included statistics on public assistance and nonpublic assistance households, net income levels, and household size. The current survey, which is much more extensive than the profiles, examines such things as income sources, gross and net incomes, various itemized deductions, age and sex of household heads, work status, participating students, and the elderly.

"When we started the project in the spring of 1975," said Ms. Merck, "we had to start from scratch to develop a comprehensive survey that would accurately represent the entire caseload."

Ms. Merck and her staff in Washington designed and tested a questionnaire that was used by FNS field representatives in the 273 project areas selected for the survey. There are a total of 3,046 project areas—comparable to counties—offering the Food Stamp Program.

In selecting project areas, the survey staff designed a sampling plan that would insure a final sample from which statistically valid national inferences could be drawn. "To include adequate representation from different types of counties, we had to consider characteristics of the areas as well as of the participants who live there," explained Steve Schroffel, the FNS statistician who developed the study design and oversaw data gathering.

The survey included a separate sampling for the 25 largest projects in the 50 States and District of Columbia—projects with 80,000 or more recipients. This was because characteristics of participants in each of these projects are special to that area. The remaining projects were chosen to insure a good cross-section according to size, predominance of public assistance and nonpublic assistance households, and urban and rural areas. A sampling plan was developed specifically for Puerto Rico, and findings for that area were tabulated separately. The characteristics of Puerto Rican participants are so different from the rest of the caseload that the overall figures would have changed substantially had they been tabulated together.

"We selected individual cases randomly within all of the sample project areas," Mr. Schroffel said. "In all, we sampled 11,508 household records, and found 11,327 of them complete enough to use."

Examining the case records was the responsibility of FNS field representatives—over 250 food stamp officers-in-charge were involved in data gathering. The OIC's channeled the completed questionnaires through the FNS Regional Offices to Washington, and with the help of the FNS automated data processing staff, the survey staff used the USDA computer system to review the questionnaires and tabulate data for analysis.

"From our analysis we drew up the report of our findings, including detailed demographic and economic descriptions of participating households," Carolyn Merck explained. "The report points out that sampled households were certified to participate in the Food Stamp Program in September 1975, under regulations which were in effect at that time."

The following are highlights of the findings for the 50 States and District of Columbia:

## Income Sources

Source	Percentage of All Households
<b>AFDC</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Salaries</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Social Security</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>"Other Income"</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>SSI</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>GA</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>VA</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Roomer/Boarder</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Self-Employment</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Railroad Ret. and Other Pensions</b>	<b>*</b>
<b>Student Aid</b>	<b>*</b>

\* Less than 1 percent.

**S**tatistics on income sources are key to understanding the general nature of the food stamp caseload. The survey showed that recipients had income from many sources, but primarily from a variety of income transfer programs. The most common source of income among food stamp households was Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), followed by earned income. The least common single source was student aid.

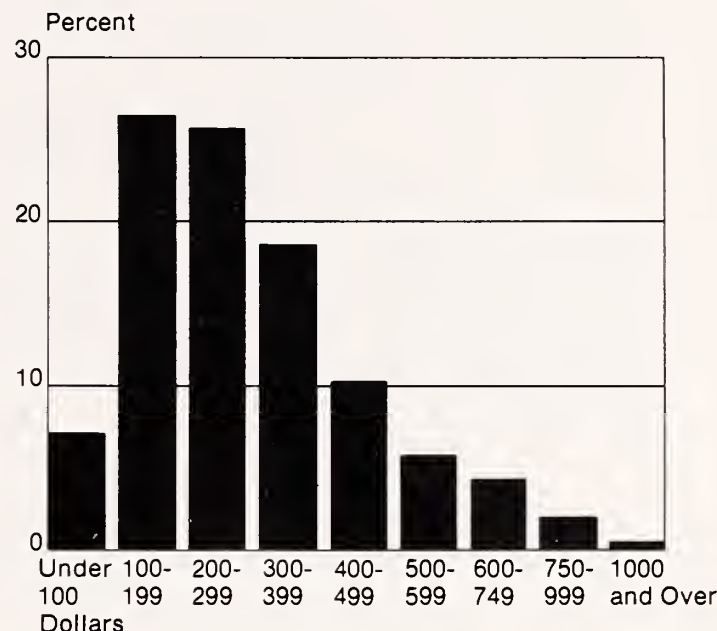
About 62 percent of all households had only one source of income. Three percent of the households reported no income at all. The remainder of the caseload claimed two or more sources of income.

The study found that 42 percent of all households received AFDC. Twenty-one percent of all households received income from Social Security; 17 percent received Supplemental Security Income (SSI); 8 percent had general assistance income; and 3 percent had veteran's benefits.

About 22 percent of all households reported income from salaries and wages. Interestingly, only 1 percent reported self-employment income; this included farmers. Less than 1 percent of households reported either railroad retirement or other pensions, or student aid.

Additionally, 19 percent of the caseload reported "other income" sources, including unemployment compensation, alimony and child support, and other individual sources.

## Distribution by Monthly Gross Income



**O**f all households receiving food stamps in September 1975, 59 percent had a total cash income, or gross income, of less than \$300 a month. Another 18 percent had a gross income between \$300 and \$400 a month. Only 2.3 percent of all food stamp households had incomes over \$750 per month and the vast majority of those had five or more household members.

According to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) poverty guidelines in effect in September 1975, 77 percent of all food stamp households were living below the poverty level. This percentage remained fairly constant for all household sizes.

The average gross cash income from all sources for all households in the 50 States was \$298 per month. The average gross income in Puerto Rico was well below that, at \$211 per month.



## Distribution by Household Size

**Average = 3.2 Persons**

	Percentage of All Households
<b>1 and 2 Persons</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>3 and 4 Persons</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>5 and Over</b>	<b>23</b>

The average participating household contained 3.2 persons. About 45 percent of all households had one or two members. About 40 percent had three to five members, under 15 percent had six or more members.

Looking at size distribution in another way, about 20 percent of all participants lived in one- or two-person households, 50 percent lived in three- to five-person households, and 30 percent lived in households of six persons or more.

The average household size varied when certain other characteristics were taken into account. For instance, the average size of a household headed by a woman was 3.0 persons; when a man headed the household, the size averaged 3.6 persons. The size of households receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children averaged 3.9 persons.

The size of Puerto Rican households was well over the U.S. average, at 4.3 persons per household.

## Average Deductions

	Average Dollar Amount when Claimed	Percentage Households Claiming Deductions
<b>Shelter</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>72.1</b>
<b>Work Allowance</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>22.4</b>
<b>Medical</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>18.8</b>
<b>Payroll</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>17.8</b>
<b>Child Care</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>2.9</b>
<b>Boarder Allotment</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>1.7</b>
<b>Education</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>1.6</b>
<b>Casualty</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>0.4</b>
<b>Alimony</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>0.4</b>
<b>Attendant Food Costs</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>0.2</b>
<b>Attendant Salaries</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>0.1</b>
<b>All Deductions</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>83</b>

The regulations in effect at the time of the survey allowed food stamp recipients a number of itemized deductions. Households subtracted these deductions from their gross income to figure their net income. Net income is the basis for determining eligibility for the program.

Allowable deductions included: shelter costs; medical costs; payroll deductions, such as income taxes, Social Security taxes, retirement payments and union dues; tuition and required fees for education; alimony payments; child care and invalid expenses; work allowance deductions, including compensation for services performed as an employee, or training allowance, to be no more than \$30 per month per household.

Over 72 percent claimed shelter deductions. Shelter costs—utilities, rent, mortgage payments and interest, and real estate taxes—were calculated as the amount over 30 percent of household income after all other deductions were computed.

More than 22 percent of all households claimed work allowance deductions; 18.8 percent took medical deductions; 17.8 percent took deductions for payroll taxes. Other deductions, claimed by less than 3 percent, included child care, boarder allotment, education, casualty, alimony, and salaries and food costs for live-in attendants.

The total deduction for all households averaged \$77 per month—that average included the 17 percent of the caseload which claimed no deductions at all. The total deduction for households claiming deductions averaged \$93 per month. Among households in Puerto Rico, total deductions averaged only \$39 per month.

## Average Household Purchase Requirement

Gross Monthly Income	Percentage of Gross Income
\$0	—
1-99	8
100-214	15
215-284	19
285-849	20-21
840-999	19
1000-1249	18
1250 +	13
All	19

## Median Certification Period (When Specified)

All Households 6-9 months

Households Headed by Elderly Persons 10-12 months

Under the regulations in effect in September 1975, the amount a household paid for its food stamps varied on a sliding scale, according to household size and monthly net income.

The average purchase requirement for all households was \$57 per month, or 19.2 percent of the average gross monthly income.

The study shows that the amount of the purchase requirement was directly influenced by gross income and household size. As can be expected, smaller households paid considerably smaller proportions of their gross income for their food stamps than larger households. For instance, single persons with incomes between \$215 and \$284 per month paid 11.8 percent of their net incomes for food stamps, while 8-person households with the same income paid 23.7 percent, or a difference of \$32 per month.

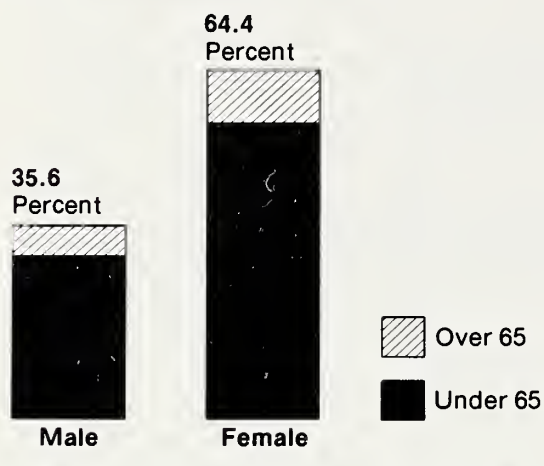
Although the amount of the purchase requirement was designed to rise proportionately with gross income, the survey showed this was not always the case. In proportion to gross income, the amount of the purchase requirement sometimes decreased as gross income and deductions increased. For example, the few 1-person households with gross incomes between \$560 and \$625 per month paid only 3.2 percent of their gross incomes for their food stamps because they had unusually high deductions.

Certification periods for food stamp households vary according to individual circumstances. When a household gets recertified for food stamps, a certification worker determines the next certification period for that household, individually. The determination depends on the stability and amount of income, as well as other variables which may change eligibility status—like household size and net income.

The survey found that some households do not have a specified period of time in which they have to return for recertification, although about 87 percent of all households reported a specific certification period. This 87 percent included households which were recertified for Aid to Families with Dependent Children at the same time. Among the households with specific certification periods, the median certification period was 6 to 9 months. Households with gross incomes of less than \$100 per month showed shorter certification periods.

The elderly reported a longer median certification period than did most households. For those elderly who had specified periods, the median certification period was 10 to 12 months. The reason for this is presumably due to more stable income patterns.

## Age and Sex Distribution of Household Heads

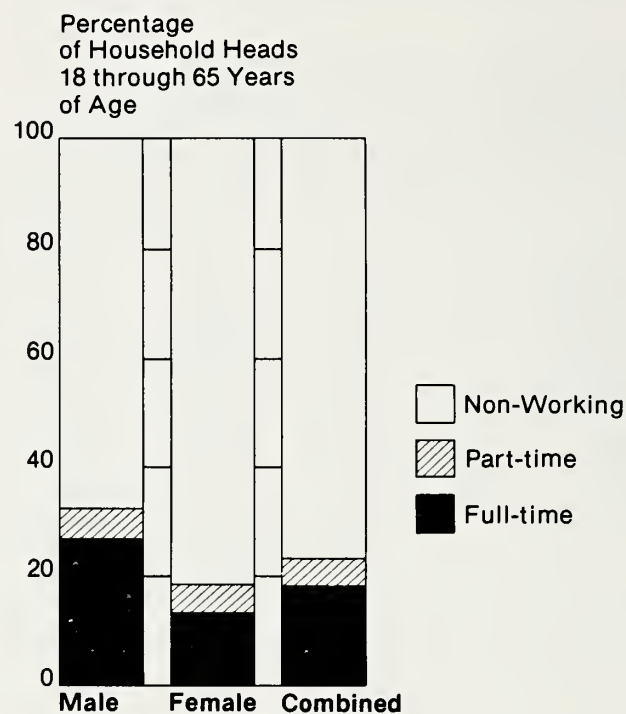


**F**emales headed 64 percent of all food stamp households. Fifty percent of the female heads of households were 35 years of age and younger, while 35 percent were age 36 to 65, and 15 percent were older than 65. About 70 percent had children age 18 or younger.

Among the households headed by males, 39 percent of the household heads were under age 35, while 46 percent were age 36 to 65, and 15 percent were older than 65. About 60 percent had children age 18 or younger.

In Puerto Rico, the pattern was reversed, as only 46 percent of all food stamp households were headed by women.

## Work Status



**T**he majority of household heads—77 percent—did not hold a paying job at the time of the study, even though program regulations then in effect required all “able-bodied” members of households to register for work and accept suitable employment. Exceptions to this requirement included: mothers or other members of the household who had to take care of dependent children under age 18, or of incapacitated adults; those who were physically or mentally disabled; people older than age 65; and students who were enrolled at least half-time in recognized schools or training programs.

Of all heads of households (age 18 through 65), 18 percent were working full-time and 5 percent were working part-time. In Puerto Rico, 26 percent of all heads of households were working.

As expected, a greater proportion of male heads of households were working than their female counterparts. The study shows that the majority of participating female heads of households were exempt from the work registration requirement, based on age and presence of children in the household. However, 18 percent of those age 18 to 65 were working.

This information on work status and earned income indicates that the Food Stamp Program is not now a major source of income supplementation for the working poor.



## Elderly

885,000 Households	(17 percent of total households)
1,000,000 Persons	(6 percent of total participants)
Average Deduction Claimed	\$46 per month
Average Household Size	1.7 persons
Median Specified Certification Period	10-12 months
Average Gross Income	\$223 per month
Average Net Income	\$178 per month

**A** total of 1 million people age 65 or older were participating in the Food Stamp Program in September 1975. About 17 percent of all households included at least one elderly person. The average size of households with elderly members was 1.7 persons.

While more than 88 percent of these households contained one or two members, elderly persons made up only 42 percent of all one-person households. The large majority of these elderly one-person households were women.

The total deduction among households with elderly members averaged \$46 per month, more than \$30 below the national average of \$77 per month.

## Summary

Here are the major survey findings for the 50 States and the District of Columbia:

- The size of food stamp households averaged 3.2 persons. Households of one and two persons made up 46 percent of all households.

- Gross income for all households averaged \$298 per month. Average net income for all households was \$223 per month.

- Forty-two percent of all households received income from Aid to Families with Dependent Children. Twenty-two percent of all households received income from salaries and wages. Only 0.8 percent received student aid.

- The average total amount of deductions from gross income was \$77 per month for all households—for those who claimed a deduction as well as those who did not. About 83 percent of all households claimed some deduction. The average deduction for these households was \$93 per month.

- Five percent of all households were certified as having zero net food stamp income. These households had no purchase requirement and received their allotments free. About two-thirds of these households also showed zero gross income.

- There were 1 million elderly people (age 65 and older) in the Food Stamp Program, about 6 percent of total participants.

- Of all households, 76.6 percent were headed by people who were not working and who reported no income; 15.4 percent were headed by people who were working full-time, and 4.5 percent were headed by people working part-time (less than 30 hours per week). Of all households headed by non-working people, 3.5 percent reported income earned from some other household member.

- Sixty-four percent of all households were headed by females. The average size of these households was 3.0 persons. Households headed by males averaged 3.6 persons.

- There was a wide dispersion of length of certification periods, with the median reported between 6 and 9 months.

- Among households with neither Supplemental Security Income nor income from Aid to Families with Dependent Children, the median value of reported assets was \$0.

- The average purchase requirement for all households was \$57 per month, 19.2 percent of the average gross monthly income.

For Puerto Rico:

- The average gross income was \$211 per month.

- Total deductions averaged \$39 per month.

- The average household size was 4.3 persons.

This study will be used widely both within and outside of the government. FNS plans this to be an annual study, so that the nature of the program and its participants can be assessed and evaluated on a yearly basis. The survey will allow program administrators to follow trends in the program and chart what impact changes in the law and regulations have on the food stamp population.



# McDOWELL COUNTY 15 YEARS LATER



By Joseph Dunphy

**E**lderson Muncie no longer participates in the Food Stamp Program. Neither does Ed Levy nor Elbert Hale. But the names are still fresh in the memories of Don Roberts, and Grace Strain, and Gladolia Lash, present and former personnel with the West Virginia Department of Welfare.

It was 15 years ago, on May 29, 1961, that Elderson Muncie walked into John Henderson's supermarket in Welch, West Virginia, and paid for his grocery purchases with food stamps, the first purchase ever under the then brand

The first pilot food stamp project began in this West Virginia county in 1961. Since then, there have been dynamic changes in the operation of the program.

new pilot program.

"The first thing he bought was two watermelons," pointed out Don Roberts, West Virginia's food stamp program director.

Don Roberts had been an employee of the State Welfare Department less than a month when he handed the unemployed miner the first food stamps ever issued in that State.

"I was scared to death," Mr. Roberts said, recalling the whirr of TV cameras and the flash of photographic equipment as the purchase made headlines.

It was the beginning of a pro-

gram that started out as a "seat of the pants" operation and mushroomed into the largest food assistance program in the history of the United States.

## One of nine pilot projects

There is probably no better place to look at the dynamic changes that have taken place in the Food Stamp Program in the past 15 years than McDowell County, West Virginia, a mining community in the Appalachian Mountains that has almost grown up with the program.

Most of the towns in McDowell bear striking similarities. They are set in the hollow of the mountains, and their configurations are basically oblong. A town may run for a mile or more, but there is seldom more than one street. Expansion toward the mountains is usually halted by a stream to one side and the ever present railroad tracks leading from the mines on the other side.

In 1961, McDowell County was selected, along with eight other counties in the Nation, to take part in the pilot program. The county's unemployment rate was extremely high due to the many mine closings in the area that had taken place since the end of World War II. Another reason for the high unemployment was the technological advancement of the mining industry that saw sophisticated machinery taking the place of pick-and-shovel miners.

The lack of demand for coal and the mechanization of the industry took its toll on people like Elderson Muncie, Ed Levy, and Elbert Hale, all early recipients in the Food Stamp Program. The people of McDowell were in desperate straits 15 years ago, according to State and local officials, and all that seemed left was the final knockout punch. But it never came.

The story of what happened in McDowell since then is a Frank Merriwell classic. It's a story where cooperative efforts of government and private industry helped the area to once again become a thriving community.

Along with the Food Stamp Program, the government's program of assistance to victims of Black Lung disease, a work-related illness



of the mining industry, brought about a much needed economic revival to the area. In addition, jobs became abundant when several manufacturers of the modern mining equipment relocated their plants in southern West Virginia.

Now, long-time residents of the county proudly point to newly painted houses throughout towns like Welch, the county seat.

"You never would have seen fresh paint on a house around here 15 or 20 years ago. People just couldn't afford it then," said Raymond Bean, the new owner of the store where the first stamps were redeemed.

#### **Staff remembers early days**

Millions of dollars in coupons have passed through stores and supermarkets since the program began. And since then there have been numerous changes in program administration.

Don Roberts is a native of McDowell County. He was unemployed when he applied for the State job as an eligibility specialist for the new Food Stamp Program and he saw the position as shaky at best.

"We were guaranteed a job for 60 days and that was it," the State director said. "At the end of that time we just didn't know. And, of course, there were the constant rumors that the program wouldn't last and commodities would come back instead."

As the "60-day job" moved past its 15th year this spring, Don Roberts said the moving force behind the program in those early days was Grace Strain, the State's first food stamp director.

"She was the program in West Virginia for a long time," he said.

Ms. Strain is now retired and working as a consultant for the State's Department of Transportation. She was the person responsible for the unenviable task of "selling" the program to the people of West Virginia.

"The people were happy with the donated food program," she said, "because it didn't cost them anything. They felt threatened by this new thing called a purchase requirement."

Ms. Strain remembered her intro-

duction to the new program was somewhat forced.

"It was the end of February in 1961. It was my first day back on the job with the welfare department after a stay in the hospital," she said. . . "I received a call from the commissioner asking me if I would like to head the program. I said I would have to have some time to think about it. About an hour later, he called back to tell me that people from the Department of Agriculture were here to talk about the program and asked if I could come up."

The USDA people were Wally Warren and John McClellan, now Administrator and Deputy Administrator of FNS' Mid-Atlantic Region.

One of Ms. Strain's first concerns as director was to have the program accepted by the community. "We spent a lot of time talking with county people and civic leaders, explaining the program to them," she said. "The grocers' associations did a real job for us. Our main emphasis was that food stamps would bring money into the county."

"We met a lot of resistance initially, but once they got on the program, the people liked it better," she added.

The day-to-day operation of the Food Stamp Program in 1961 was very different than it is now.

"There was no such thing as policy in the beginning," Don Roberts said. "Policy determinations were made on the spot. And they were subject to change the next day."

Mr. Roberts got to know food stamps from all angles over the last 15 years. He saw the program grow from its struggling infancy into the coordinated and computerized giant that has made West Virginia a leader in the areas of food stamp accountability, issuance, and quality control.

In 1962, he left the Welch certification office for the State capital in Charleston, where he handled financial reports.

"Back then there was one man doing the financial reports for the State," Mr. Roberts said. "Now, we have eight to ten computers doing the job."

His other duties in the program

included that of a field representative during the program's expansion. He later became Ms. Strain's assistant and finally took over the directorship when she retired from that position.

#### **A leader in administration**

During the past 15 years, West Virginia's Food Stamp Program has come to be looked on as a model of sophisticated computerization. Computers now handle virtually all of the food stamp activities in the State, ranging from processing applications, to issuance, quality control, and inventory.

In 1970, West Virginia became the first State to begin computerized mail issuance of food stamps to public assistance households. The next year the State inaugurated non-public assistance mail issuance.

West Virginia's Welfare Commissioner, Thomas Tinder, said the State's mail-out issuance capability is a great benefit.

"Our State is basically rural," he said. "With mail-out issuance, the people in these rural areas no longer have the problem of getting to the county seat to pick up their coupons."

Other innovations in the West Virginia program include:

- Authorization-to-purchase cards or stamps mailed out the day after a case has been certified.
- Computer terminals in area offices that feed data to a computer master file.
- A computerized quality control system that picks out at random 2,000 to 3,000 cases each month for caseworker checks.
- A reconciliation and inventory control system that provides a daily report on all authorization-to-purchase cards cashed.

A food stamp supervisor in the FNS Mid-Atlantic Region told a story that reveals just how tight are the controls of the West Virginia program. "A man came into an area office one day to redeem some old series coupons for new ones. He was asked to wait a bit, and in just a few minutes, the caseworker had identified that the man had been on the program but the stamps he wished to redeem were issued 3



months after he was off the program. I don't know of another operation that could have made that determination so quickly," the supervisor said.

#### Changes have been helpful

Down in Welch, some of the people in the area office have seen all the changes in the program since that first day in 1961. Gladolia Lash, who started with the Food Stamp Program at the same time as Don Roberts, said many regulatory changes have been helpful.

"I think the best change in the program was when the amount of stamps for a household size became constant," said Ms. Lash, now an eligibility supervisor with the Welch office. "Before that, the amount of stamps varied even though there was the same num-

ber of people in a household. This caused a lot of concern among the recipients because they would stand in line and compare how much each was getting."

As Ms. Lash spoke, a train whistle that sounded like it was in the next room blew loud and long as a string of coal cars carried their valuable commodity down from the mines. She waited patiently as the ear-splitting shrill subsided.

"The noisy trains don't bother the people who work here in the welfare office," she explained, "because as long as you hear them, there aren't any strikes."

Commissioner Tinder said he had only a passing acquaintance with the Food Stamp Program before taking his present position. Now, he sees the program as one

of major benefit to the people of West Virginia and to the State coffers. His mathematics are hard to dispute.

"Food stamp sales in West Virginia are running about \$100 million a year. With our 3 percent sales tax, that's \$3 million going to the State. Less some \$1.7 million in administrative costs, West Virginia realizes a profit of \$1.3 million because of the program," the commissioner explained.

Grace Strain has watched the program from its earliest days to the present. She believes that while the program isn't perfect, "...it's the best program West Virginia ever had."

Translated into West Virginese, the Food Stamp Program may not be heaven, but... ☆

## A Bicentennial Salute to Louisiana

By Melanie Watts



Mount Hermon is a small farming community in Louisiana, just about 4 miles from the Mississippi State line. All youngsters in the area—from kindergarten through high school—attend the same old frame schoolhouse, which has 20-foot ceilings, hardwood floors, and small gas heaters lined up in the narrow hallways.

The building is surrounded by enormous oak trees draped in low-hanging moss. It's a beautiful setting—and a particularly appropriate one for a celebration held there last spring.

In April, all 624 students at Mount Hermon School, together with the entire faculty, spent a full day honoring our Nation's 200th birthday with special emphasis on the Louisiana Purchase. In that famous arrangement with France in 1803, the United States bought territory that opened the doors for westward expansion.

"The whole thing got started by Betty Booty, our cafeteria manager," explains Jackie Newton, the school's counselor. "She's been serving bi-centennial lunches all year, but







# HELPING KIDS MAKE BETTER FOOD CHOICES

Lots of students are learning to make better food choices--and they're having fun doing it! These stories show how teachers, food service staffs, and others are working to make nutrition something kids want to learn about.

## WORKING WITH LANGUAGE CLASSES

In a year-long nutrition education project, children learned about food and nutrition as they developed language skills. Tasting parties were among the activities the youngsters enjoyed.

"You're not going to make us eat this raw cabbage, are you?" the little girl asked, horrified. She and teaching aide Mary Lowney were on their way back from the school cafeteria, where they had picked up food for a special "tasting party." Ms. Lowney had just explained that everyone in the class would have a chance to taste cabbage prepared several different ways.

"We'll have cooked cabbage wedges and cabbage soup, like your mother makes it," she had said, "and we'll have uncooked shredded cabbage and two kinds of coleslaw, including the kind the school cafeteria serves."

The child was excited about the

preparations—it wasn't every day someone set up an electric skillet and cooked right in the classroom. And later, friends from other classrooms would be joining her class for the tasting party.

But coleslaw still sounded terrible, and she had never even tried the cafeteria's coleslaw. Neither had many of the other bilingual students at Rogers School.

Mary Lowney understood why eating uncooked cabbage was something new to the little girl and her schoolmates. They had just recently moved to the United States from Portugal, and there cabbage is always served cooked. The woman smiled and said, "I wouldn't ask you to do anything that would hurt you." She told the child that she, too, was from a Portuguese family—she grew up on the island of Madeira—and hadn't eaten raw cabbage until she moved to America. Now, she said, she likes it and knows it has lots of vitamin C.

Ms. Lowney was one of two bilingual aides working with a year-long nutrition education project in Lowell, Massachusetts. Along with Spanish-speaking aide Lucy Johnson, she helped children learn about food and nutrition as they developed language skills.

The nutrition education project, completed in May, involved 329 students, ages 5 to 14, enrolled in Lowell's bilingual program. Funded by a grant from FNS, the project had two inter-related aims. The first was to study the food preferences of the Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking children, and their families, and identify problem areas in food consumption. And the second was to develop ways to increase their understanding of nutrition and their participation in

school food service programs.

Under the direction of the Massachusetts Bureau of Nutrition Education and School Food Services, nutrition consultant Mary Ann MacDonough coordinated the project with Ann O'Donnell, supervisor of the bilingual program.

"The bilingual program is designed for children who are just learning to speak English," Ann O'Donnell explained. "We have many children whose families have recently come from Portugal or the Azores—a pattern that started years ago when whaling vessels traveled between New England and the Portuguese islands.

"And we also have Spanish-speaking children originally from Puerto Rico," she added.

Most of the project focused on working with the children. But project coordinators also involved the community in a series of workshops that helped them understand the children's food preferences and eating habits. They invited parents, teachers, directors of school food services and of the science and health departments, and representatives from the Massachusetts Cooperative Extension Service.

"We set up these parent-community meetings by making arrangements through churches," explained Mary Ann MacDonough. "The workshops gave us insight into the children's nutritional needs and possible ways to improve their nutritional well-being. They were good opportunities to increase the nutrition awareness of parents, too."

Other useful information about the children's eating habits came from an analysis of food they ate at school. Ms. MacDonough conducted a plate waste study in the cafeterias and classrooms with the help of the two bilingual aides and



staff members from the Bureau of Nutrition Education and School Food Services.

Results indicated that the bilingual students were low in consumption of milk products, fruits, and vegetables. Food preference tests, later conducted in the classrooms, showed a positive correlation between foods the bilingual students said they liked and items they actually ate during the plate waste study.

Ms. MacDonough said these results were useful in developing appropriate nutrition education activities with teachers. In after-school workshops, the nutrition consultant explained ways to incorporate nutrition education into math, science, and social studies lessons, particularly stressing the importance of milk, fruits, and vegetables—foods the bilingual children did not eat in adequate amounts.

"Eleven teachers in the bilingual program volunteered to participate without compensation in these workshops," the project coordinator said, "and others received individual help."

Some workshop discussions focused on a special nutrition education curriculum guide, correlated with the Lowell bilingual curriculum guide. Ms. MacDonough had developed the guide during the previous summer with assistance from the bilingual aides and input from teachers and the Bureau of Nutrition Education.

The teachers' response to the workshops was enthusiastic, and they later enjoyed putting to use in their classrooms some of the methods they had learned.

In one project, two white rats came to live in several of the bilingual classrooms, courtesy of the New England Dairy Council. The aim was to demonstrate the effects of milk on growth, grooming, and disposition by comparing the development of two rats fed different diets over a 5-week period. One rat received a well-balanced diet, and the other got the same foods with the exception of milk and milk products.

The students fed the rats, cleaned the cages, and kept track of the

animals' weight. They also held classes for their schoolmates, native-born as well as bilingual students.

Tasting parties were among other activities students shared with their classmates. The parties were excellent opportunities for school food service personnel and teachers to work as a team in planning and carrying out nutrition education activities. For example, at the cabbage tasting party at Rogers School, school food service manager Bridie O'Connor worked closely with classroom teacher Doris Leggat and Portuguese aide Mary Lowney.

The mother of a student had made the soup ahead of time, but Mary Lowney prepared everything else in the classroom. While the cabbage wedges simmered in the skillet, she talked about nutrition and chatted with students about native and American foods.

"Does your mother add potatoes to cabbage soup?"

"Is salsa (parsley) used in large quantities as a seasoning for Portuguese foods?"

She reviewed the nutrients contained in cabbage and other vegetables and fruits. Raw cabbage has

lots of vitamin C—even more than cooked cabbage, she said.

"This time I did most of the preparation myself," Ms. Lowney pointed out. "Since our time was limited, students were not as involved as they could have been. They were getting ready for their guests from other classrooms."

The bilingual students had sent invitations:

"Dear Walter, we would like you to come to a tasting party in Room 104. It will be February 12th at one o'clock. We hope you will come. Your friend, Virginia Castro."

Walter came, and so did many others. When they arrived, tiny Portuguese flags were pinned to their lapels or shirts. And, while folk music played in the background, they enjoyed cabbage in all its variations.

"The Portuguese day was such a big success," Doris Leggat said, "other teachers have asked, 'Why can't we do it for the other ethnic groups?' And Rogers School has begun to do this."

As a follow-up to the tasting party, Ms. O'Connor and her staff served a special Portuguese lunch to all 735 students at the Rogers School. The lunch, which featured popular cabbage soup, offered native-born students the opportunity to learn about the foods of other nations, as those who immigrate to this country become familiar with ours.

In working with both students and parents, project coordinators emphasized that ethnic foods are wholesome and good. "What we wanted the families to understand was that their total diet would be more nutritious if supplemented with additional fruits, vegetables and milk products," pointed out Mary Ann MacDonough.

At meetings conducted in native languages at community centers and parish halls, the coordinators provided suggestions on food shopping and menu planning and stressed the importance of reading nutrition labels on cans and packages. They hope to get community input in the development of ethnic recipes for school lunches during the final stages of the project. Other final activities will include



*A tasting party introduced these students to something new—eating uncooked cabbage.*



additional plate waste studies and evaluations.

This cooperative project of the Massachusetts Department of Education and the Lowell School District is one of several nutrition education projects funded by FNS throughout the country. The overall goals of the projects are: to increase children's awareness of nutrition and encourage their participation in school food service programs. Projects in different States use various approaches to accomplish this.

In Lowell, bilingual students are learning about American diet as they learn the language. They're acquiring new words and new food habits, and at the same time, they're sharing their food heritage with fellow students.

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## WATCHING ANIMALS GROW

In a series of animal feeding studies, seventh graders learned the importance of eating a variety of good foods. They later shared the results of their experiments with other classes.

You are what you eat. And students in College Park, Georgia, proved it with six white rats.

By putting three pairs of 3-week-old rats on special diets, seventh graders at The Meadows Elementary School dramatically demonstrated the importance of good nutrition. And, with the help of local high school students, they shared their knowledge with the rest of the school.

"We were studying the human body, and we were learning about nutrition, food, and health," explained one student. "And we got on the subject of not eating right, and that's how we got the rats—to show how they came out if they just ate certain foods and not a variety of good foods."

Each of the three seventh grade classes was responsible for one pair of rats. Students built the cages with the help of their teachers and were responsible for feeding and taking care of the animals.

One pair of rats—Old Dan and Little Anne—got a steady diet of hamburgers, french fries, and soft drinks, while another pair—Elmer and Lulu—ate cookies, potato chips, and other dessert and snack foods the children brought from home. Rufus and Priscilla—the "aristocrats"—dined on a diet of Type A lunches from the school cafeteria.

The results? Graphic proof of the importance of nutrition! After 4 weeks, the rats on the first two diets were smaller than those eating Type A lunches. Their fur was thinner, and their tails were scaly and discolored. Old Dan and Little Anne were sluggish and lacked curiosity, while Lulu and Elmer were nervous and irritable.

After 4 weeks, the rats that had eaten the limited variety of foods were put on Type A lunches instead. In 2 weeks their discolorations and appearances greatly improved, but they were still smaller than the rats that ate Type A lunches all 6 weeks.

The experiment was more than an isolated seventh grade science project, however; it involved other classes and subjects.

Seventh graders visited other classrooms, sharing what they had learned with the younger students. And, with the help of local high school students taking a library course, they wrote and illustrated reports about the project that were suitable for elementary students.

The classes the seventh graders visited also learned writing skills—sending invitations and thank you notes, and composing essays and short stories about the experiment.

The seventh graders learned the metric system and used it, along with the standard system, to chart the rats' growth. And, they decorated their classroom and the cafeteria with posters on nutrition. A group of students presented their experiment to a county meeting of cafeteria managers.

But, as principal Bob Hamil ex-

plained, the most important outcome of this experiment was increased student awareness of the importance of good nutrition. Their eating habits in years to come may be influenced by a simple experiment showing what makes a good diet. . .for mice and men.

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## INVOLVING PARENTS

Looking for a way to reduce plate waste in the lunchroom, a Colorado school started a nutrition education project on a trial basis. Now it's a permanent part of the curriculum, and parents are participating, too.

"I thought I didn't like Mexican food. But now, since I've started tasting everything at least once, tacos are my favorite food."

This change in attitude, and in eating habits, is taking place often among students at North Elementary School in Brighton, Colorado, since the start of a nutrition education course there.

These youngsters are learning all about the basic four food groups and daily dietary needs. And so are their parents.

A special session on nutrition was held recently for parents who had expressed an interest in the school's newest course. Twenty-five mothers showed up for the 2-hour morning lecture, and most of them stayed around to put to use what they had just learned by having a school lunch.

This adult "crash course" was a spin-off of an experiment that started in the fifth grade classes at North last year when the faculty there decided something must be done to decrease the amount of food thrown away in the cafeteria.

"The meals were good, so that wasn't the problem," recalls Carol Sarchet, principal at North. "The students didn't know very much about food. They didn't under-



stand why it's important to eat certain things every day."

Ms. Sarchet has now made the nutrition course a permanent part of the curriculum for both fifth and sixth graders, and student interest in the course is obvious.

They are more willing to taste foods that before they automatically threw away. And they make fewer complaints about meal combinations, reports the cafeteria manager, who, prior to the course, had explained the school lunch pattern to at least one customer each day.

But, even more importantly, students are taking what they learn home with them.

"We get continuous calls from parents, thanking us for instituting the nutrition course," points out Ms. Sarchet.

As a result of this favorable response, a special course on nutrition was scheduled for one of the regular parent meetings held at the school every Thursday morning. The meetings focus on important aspects of the educational process, and school administrators agreed nutrition warranted a place on the agenda.

The meeting had a larger turnout than usual, and the parents were enthusiastic. Several took notes, and many asked questions.

Fran Nelson, school lunch consultant for the Colorado State Department of Education, gave the lecture, which touched on such subjects as food classification, preparing well-balanced meals, food labeling, and unit pricing.

She also pointed out that school lunch is one of the best examples of good nutrition around, and explained that each meal is based on meal patterns set by USDA and provides approximately a third of a child's daily dietary needs.

Parents then got a chance to see what she meant when they joined the nutrition class for lunch.

Interspersed among the visitors, fifth and sixth grade students intelligently discussed nutrition and their experiences with the course.

One sixth grade girl reported that until studying nutrition last year, she never ate breakfast.

Another student, at the request

of her younger brother, taught him what she knows about nutrition and food.

"We made a chart at home, classifying foods into the different groups," she explains. "And then we made up some menus for our mother to use."

Most of the students agree that their classmates are more aware of food since the course started and realize the importance of eating the right things. They're still far from perfect, they'll admit, but at least they're trying to do better.

No one is more surprised at results of the course than the fifth grade teacher who developed the curriculum—Jean Waldren.

"The kids talk about nutrition even when we're not studying it," she reports. "And the ones who had it last year have retained an amazing amount of information."

This was evident to Fran Nelson when she visited North Elementary as guest lecturer this winter.

Students who had the course



The highlight of a nutrition education lesson for parents was eating lunch at school.

last year were able to classify foods in the four basic food groups and discuss necessary components for a Type A lunch.

District officials credit Ms. Waldren for the success of the course. Although she does not have a background in nutrition, she enlisted help from people who do, and she gathered enough information for 3 months of lesson plans.

"I was particularly interested in using a practical approach to the study of nutrition," she recalls, "something students could relate to in their own lives."

About half of North's students are from Mexican-American families, so Ms. Waldren makes certain that ethnic food preferences are thoroughly discussed.

"We make it clear that tortillas and beans are suitable for breakfast," she says.

This approach allows the teacher to tie in nutrition with the study of world history and geography.

Another course that lends itself to this integrated approach is math. For example, students use an abacus to calculate the number of nutrients in a particular food.

The study of nutrition at North has made an impression on everyone involved. Parents with children in other Brighton schools have expressed interest in the course, hoping a similar curriculum might be adopted citywide.

If the students had anything to do with it, this would probably be accomplished tomorrow. ☆

#### CORRECTION:

In the February issue of *FOOD AND NUTRITION*, the Sacramento Unified School District was mistakenly identified as a district not fully utilizing its computers in the management of its food service activities.

The Sacramento Unified School District's use of its sophisticated computer system is actually a model upon which many California school districts have based their computer use. Not only does Sacramento share printouts and flow charts with other districts in the State, they have shared the expertise of their staff.

We regret this error.

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